



Seeking Change With Quality Improvement Centers

Jason Bohn, Federal Project Officer,
Administration for Children and Families

Given the Children's Bureau's mission of child safety, permanency of placement and well-being of children and families, it is pressing that new and promising approaches to supporting children and families be tested. Quality improvement centers are one of the innovative ways that the Children's Bureau is attempting to both better understand targeted issues in the child welfare field, and stimulate new, research-based responses to those issues. Quality improvement centers are awarded funds for a planning phase and an implementation phase. During the planning phase, the center engages in a collaborative process to review the literature, clarify the focus and refine the implementation plan for the remainder of its knowledge-building activities. During the implementation phase, the center sponsors (through subgrants), monitors and is responsible for a cross-site evaluation of research or demonstration projects at multiple sites. Finally, quality improvement centers are expected to develop and disseminate knowledge about what works to states, counties and other appropriate organizations. To date, four regional centers (closed in 2007) and two national centers (on privatization of child welfare services and non-resident fathers) have been funded, with two more national centers (on differential response in child protective services, and preventing child abuse and neglect of infants and young children) awarded in September 2008.



Dear Friends,



Welcome to the first quarterly newsletter of the Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers. The partnership of the American Humane Association, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the National Fatherhood Initiative seeks to determine, through applied research, the impact of strategic approaches and program activities that promote non-resident father involvement within the child welfare system and their resulting impact on safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children.

This newsletter will keep you informed of the most current information on our knowledge development activities regarding non-resident fathers and the systems that support them and their families. We hope it will also accomplish our goal of establishing a national problem-solving and collaborative information-sharing network on the involvement of non-resident fathers and our ability to connect this strategy to child welfare outcomes.

We could not accomplish this without the leadership of our project officer, Jason Bohn, and other officers at the Children's Bureau, who guide our work, and our national advisory board and the council of non-resident fathers, who exemplify our collaborative approach. We are also deeply connected to public and private child welfare agencies, the community of fatherhood programs and the legal community, and enjoy the help and participation of other systems that contribute to the strength of dads, such as child support enforcement and employment assistance and most importantly, our own research subgrantees and their collaborative partners.

These newsletters will feature articles that explain the project, relate to the various themes of the model curriculum, share lessons learned from implementing fatherhood programs, and highlight our various partners and success stories in the making. You will also find promising practices that answer the question, "Does the involvement of a child's non-residential father make a difference in child and family outcomes?"

Sonia Velázquez
Vice President
American Humane Association Children's Division,
and principal investigator of the QIC-NRF



NATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER

ON NON-RESIDENT FATHERS AND
THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC-NRF) is a collaborative effort between the American Humane Association, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and the National Fatherhood Initiative and is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

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Contributors

Jason Bohn, Sonia Velázquez, Stefanie Vincent, Vicki Wright, Lauren Morley, Marvin Charles

Editor

Ann Ahlers

Graphic Design

Teresa Zeigler

PLEASE SHARE WITH US

Do you have pictures of your activities or a great father-and-child picture?

A story you want to share about your program?

A father or youth author who would like to share his story?

Creative artwork from someone involved with your program?

Other items to share in the newsletter?

**Send your items to
Stefanie Vincent, QIC-NRF
site coordinator at
stefaniev@
americanhumane.org**



What is the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers?

The Children's Bureau funded the American Humane Association and its partners, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the National Fatherhood Initiative to create a Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers (QIC-NRF). The focus for the project came about as a result of the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews and the *What About the Dads?* report. Both indicate that very little meaningful interaction occurs between the child welfare system and fathers. Using this information as a foundation, the QIC-NRF was designed to promote additional knowledge development regarding the engagement of non-resident fathers (fathers who do not live in the same home as their child) and their children who are involved in the child welfare system.

The purpose of this project is to determine, through research, the impact of non-resident father involvement on child welfare outcomes. Child welfare outcomes include child safety, permanence (life-long relationships), and well-being. Included in the research is the examination of the relationship between child and non-resident father and/or paternal relatives. Throughout the five years of this project (October 2006 to September 2011), information gained from the QIC-NRF will be distributed to the Children's Bureau, subgrantees of other Children's Bureau grants, child welfare agencies, private service providers, the courts and legal systems, and other stakeholders.

The QIC-NRF has a two-phase approach. The focus of Phase I, the planning phase, is the identification of gaps in service and knowledge, research priorities and experimental design. The focus of Phase II, the implementation phase, is the carrying out of the research design in four sites located throughout the nation, and the development of a process to distribute information to practitioners, policymakers, administrators and researchers. The QIC-NRF is currently in the second year of the project and Phase II began with the announcement of the subgrantees.

Through this newsletter, we intend to make possible a national, collaborative information-sharing and problem-solving network. We encourage you to learn more about the sites and the findings of the QIC-NRF in future editions!

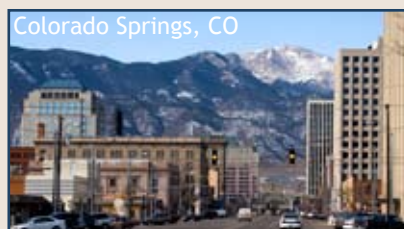




Seattle, WA



Indianapolis, IN



Colorado Springs, CO



Ft. Worth, TX

Meet the Sites

To kick off Phase II of the project, the Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers issued a request for applications for pilot sites and sent it to more than 10,000 public and private child welfare organizations across the country.

The purpose of the pilot sites, or subgrantees, is the experimentation with a model intervention and evaluation of child outcomes as the selected sites and the QIC-NRF join efforts to research the engagement of non-resident fathers with children who are involved in the child welfare system. Through this national effort, the QIC-NRF hopes to improve the child-welfare outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being.

Four sites were selected through a competitive process and announced in January. The four sites are located in El Paso County, Colo.; Marion County, Ind.; Tarrant County, Texas; and King County, Wash. Each subgrantee brings a wealth of knowledge and collaboration to the QIC-NRF. The following describes each site, its partner organizations and the collaborating fathers program.

The Colorado Department of Human Services (Colorado Springs, El Paso County) is partnering with The Center on Fathering, Policy Studies Inc., the Parenting Opportunity Program, Goodwill Industries, the Community Partnership for Child Development and the Center for Policy Research in Denver.

The Center on Fathering opened in 1995 and offers a continuum of services designed to meet the needs of fathers in their community, including education and training, support groups, outreach, and resources and referrals. The center provides a 15-session program called “Fathering” that teaches dads to be more actively and positively involved in their children’s lives.

The Indiana Department of Child Services (Indianapolis, Marion County) is collaborating with Indiana Fathers and Families Center and the Indiana University School of Social Work. The department includes the Child Support Enforcement Agency.

The Fathers and Families Center was founded in 1993. The agency is designed to enhance the capacity of fathers to become responsible and involved fathers. Fathers participate in activities centered on educational and employment advancement, parenting and basic life skills training, and support services assistance.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (Fort Worth, Tarrant County) is teaming up with members of the Tarrant County Fatherhood Coalition, New Day Services for Children and Families, the Tarrant County Workforce Development Board (Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County), Foundation Communities, Tarrant County Safety Net and Child Trends.

NewDay Services has been in the Family Law Center since 1997 and in the Juvenile Justice Center since 2000. NewDay offers a comprehensive education program that educates fathers on the importance of remaining physically, emotionally and financially active in the lives of their children.

The Washington State Division of Children and Family Services (Seattle, King County), is collaborating with the local fatherhood programs, Divine Alternatives for Dads and Fathers In Need, as well as Catalyst for Kids, the Division of Child Support, King County Juvenile Court, the Office of Public Defense, and the Community Engagement Initiative at the University of Washington School of Social Work.

Divine Alternatives for Dads (D.A.D.S.) was founded in 2003. D.A.D.S. provides child support management, parent involvement, reunification, parenting training, support groups and case management services to non-resident dads in the Seattle area.



NATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
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Tips for Dads: *Advice to Non-Residential Fathers*



1. Respect the mother of your children. Regardless of your feelings toward your children's mother, you need to treat her with respect, for the sake of the children. Children are happier and feel more secure when their parents get along. Fathers should ignore negative comments, compliment the mothers when they can and keep lines of communication open. Try to find common ground with your children's mother around common goals for the children, and never criticize your children's mother in front of the children.

2. Keep your promises. Children who have endured divorce or the breakup of a parental relationship often feel abandoned and distrustful of the adults in their lives. Fathers need to be careful to nurture or restore their children's faith in them and in adults in general. Keep the promises you make and earn your children's trust by keeping your word.



3. Do not be a "Disneyland Dad." It is tempting to spend virtually all your time with your children in fun activities. "Disneyland Dads" miss opportunities to help their children grow in virtue and miss chances to get to know their children in their ordinary lives. Spend time doing ordinary things with your children like helping with homework, having them do chores and tucking them into bed on a school night. You will discover much more about your children amidst the ordinary struggles of daily life than in eating popcorn in a darkened movie theater.

4. Stay in regular contact. Non-residential fathers should stay in regular contact with their children. If you live nearby, be faithful about seeing your children on a given day. If not living nearby, be faithful about calling or sending a letter or email to your children on a weekly basis. Children, even teenagers, thrive on maintaining regular contact with their fathers.

5. Do not be soft on your kids. Fathers often feel like they should go easy on their children when it comes to discipline. But children may take advantage of their fathers' laxity by pushing the behavioral envelope even more. Be a firm, consistent disciplinarian with your children. In the long-term, children who are disciplined well are better behaved and more respectful of their fathers than children who are given a free reign.



6. Take care of your children financially. Non-residential fathers need to take at least partial responsibility for the financial welfare of their children. Children who receive regular financial support from their fathers do better educationally and are more confident that their father is there for them and their family. Pay child support on time and be flexible enough to help your children when unforeseen expenses come up. If possible, tell your adolescents that you will help pay for college or vocational training. If money is a problem, contact a local fatherhood program to get help with job skills, job placement and addressing any outstanding child support owed.



This material is adapted from The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. (2006). The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children (Appendix E). Retrieved September 26, 2008, from the Child Welfare Information Gateway, at http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/append_e_8.cfm



Meet Marvin and Jeanett Charles

Marvin and Jeanett Charles are the co-founders of Divine Alternatives for Dads Services (D.A.D.S.). Marvin has overcome a personal history as a foster child, a homeless man and a pimp in California, Montana, Spokane and ultimately Seattle. He did not find his biological mother until he was 43 years old. In the same year, he reunited with his father. His father, who has had a stroke and does not say much, is delighted to have his son and five grandchildren in his life.

Marvin had the courage and determination to move beyond his own history with drugs and alcohol, unlawful behavior, homelessness and promiscuity. At the age of 43, after having seven children out of wedlock, he began to realize that his life needed to be committed to God and to the kinds of good works that require honesty and hope in the face of hopelessness. In less than a decade, Marvin moved from getting clean and sober to having a personal mission to help other men and their children so that they can move beyond the ill effects of fatherlessness.

Jeanett was raised by a single father in an era when this rarely happened. She also struggled to be free from drugs and irresponsibility. According to Jeanett and Marvin, child protective services informed them that they would lose custody of their children if they did not turn their lives around in 90 days. The possibility of losing their children permanently to the state of Washington triggered powerful change.

Marvin and Jeanett worked to keep their four younger children under their roof. The impact of the family's separation persisted for many years. Not only have Marvin and Jeanett learned to be voices for their community, they have also learned to recognize how the challenges of

raising children and becoming new homeowners require new skills in managing family change and development.

D.A.D.S. was created in 1998 in Marvin and Jeanett's living room in Rainier Valley. In 2000, they completed the paperwork for a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. In 2004, D.A.D.S. opened a storefront office at 5709 Rainier Avenue South. Volunteers and generous donors contributed to rehabilitating a trashed lot into a playground and interior renovations created a family-centered house of healing and redemption.

Marvin often says his only education beyond high school has been the streets, and his B.A. stands for "born again." Jeanett has a quiet strength and steadiness. She holds the men accountable for their responsibilities in making change happen.

Men who go through D.A.D.S. begin making child support payments or begin to make more regular payments. A majority increase the number of hours they spend with their children in meaningful activity. As their problems begin to be resolved and become more manageable, some men marry and create a home for their children. Some men become the custodial parent of their children or grandchildren.

Some of the men find God and begin to know healthy relationships for the first time in their lives. Many of these men have traveled into their middle years without knowing the benchmarks of healthy relationships. It is hard for those who have not walked beside these men to appreciate how much it means to join in fellowship with other men, and to slowly reveal to each other their common needs and desires to become better fathers, grandfathers, sons and spouses.

QIC-NRF Holds First Meeting With Funded Research Sites



Members of the four subgrantee sites and partners of the QIC-NRF met to coordinate research, facilitation and other aspects of the project.



The Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers held its kick-off meeting in April 2008 with the partners and the directors, evaluators and facilitators of the four fatherhood research sites in order to coordinate consistent replication of the model curriculum and other program aspects. Besides “getting-to-know-you” activities, feedback on the proposed model from the sites, and other business, partners discussed features of the QIC-NRF. These include the requirement for internal review board approval at each site, a centralized Dad’s Council for input, and the need to build a collaborative network of grantees. The group learned about (and you can too by following the links):

- the “Father Friendly Check-Up” for child welfare caseworkers, developed by the National Fatherhood Institute, to determine if the sites’ environments, activities and attitudes are “father-friendly” (<http://www.fatherhood.org/checkupsocial.asp>).
- the “40 Developmental Assets,” developed by The Search Institute to specify what family and community factors are important in healthy child development (<http://www.search-institute.org/assets>).
- the QIC-NRF website, developed by the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law to report QIC-NRF activities and other fatherhood research, information and links (www.fatherhoodqic.org).

The use of small groups was helpful in the discussions of the common activities necessary for consistency across the four sites. The directors and program evaluators met to discuss procedures for the overall research design. The research design includes the research questions to be answered, the program process (including a flow chart handout), informed consent explanations and forms, and other requirements to ensure father confidentiality, yet reliability of the data. The group reviewed a draft of the father interview to be used as the central data-collection instrument. Other possible data collection includes administrative/case record review, social worker and facilitator interviews and state data collection (i.e., AFCARS and NCANDS). Everyone involved participated heartily in the discussion and added value to the evaluation plan.

The facilitators met separately in order to extensively review *Bringing Back the Dads: A Model Program Curriculum for Non-Resident Father Engagement*, which will be used in the fatherhood groups. The QIC-NRF will guide the work and early activities of the facilitators to 1) maintain fidelity to the model across pilot sites; 2) be responsive to the expectations and promises of the QIC proposal and pilot sites; and 3) help create a positive and meaningful group experience for the Dads at the sites.

The group will meet semiannually in order to ensure that they coordinate sufficiently to assure evaluation success. The next meeting will be in October 2008 in Kansas City, Kansas.

Researching the Interventions Needed to Engage Non-Resident Fathers of Children Involved in the Child Welfare System

Studies show that there is little meaningful engagement between the child welfare system and fathers. The Quality Improvement Center for Non-Resident Fathers was designed to gain additional knowledge regarding fathers and their children who are involved in the child welfare system. To increase our knowledge, QIC-NRF partners created a model program for research into these areas. The model program includes two major practice interventions: gender-specific first contact with fathers and a 20-week facilitated peer support group intervention.

While the first intervention is clear, the second will incorporate three elements found to be helpful in involving fathers: 1) self-help with peer support; 2) information on navigating the child welfare system and related systems, including child support, juvenile and family courts, and visitation; and 3) education and skills building related to shared parenting, child development, parental self-care and the role of culture in parenting. *Bringing Back the Dads: A Model Program Curriculum for Non-Resident Father Engagement* was developed by a team of experts within the QIC-NRF partnership and is based on findings that programs designed to help fathers navigate systems while strengthening system collaboration have proven helpful. This curriculum was created to educate and engage non-resident fathers whose children have been removed from their primary caretakers and who are involved in the child welfare system, in the context of a peer father support group. The following are subject areas the dads will learn about and discuss in weekly meetings:



- **Dad as Part of the Solution: Overview of the Child Welfare System (2 sessions)**
- **Dad as Planner: Service Planning in the Child Welfare System**
- **Dad as Provider: Supporting Your Children**
- **Dad as Team Player: Shared Parenting**
- **Dad as Parent: Understanding Your Children**
- **Dad as Community Member: Identifying and Accessing Resources**
- **Dad as Part of the Juvenile Court Process: Legal Advocacy and Court Etiquette**
- **Dad as Part of Children's Placement: Visiting With Your Children**
- **Dad as Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You**
- **Dad as Cultural Guide: The Role of Culture in Parenting**
- **Dad as Worker: Workforce Readiness**

These 12 structured curriculum sessions will be presented in the order requested by the fathers in the four pilot sites. The structured sessions include the involvement of guest co-facilitators who come from the community agencies that fathers are likely to have contact with, such as caseworkers from the child welfare and child support systems, employees from work readiness programs and attorneys. The remaining eight weekly session meetings are intentionally unstructured so that the fathers can get to know each other, form a supportive group, and discuss and learn about the topics of greatest interest to them and their roles as fathers.

The curriculum creators believe that this will be a positive learning experience for fathers and it will have a positive effect on the safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for their children. If this experimental intervention proves effective, it will be made widely available for replication.